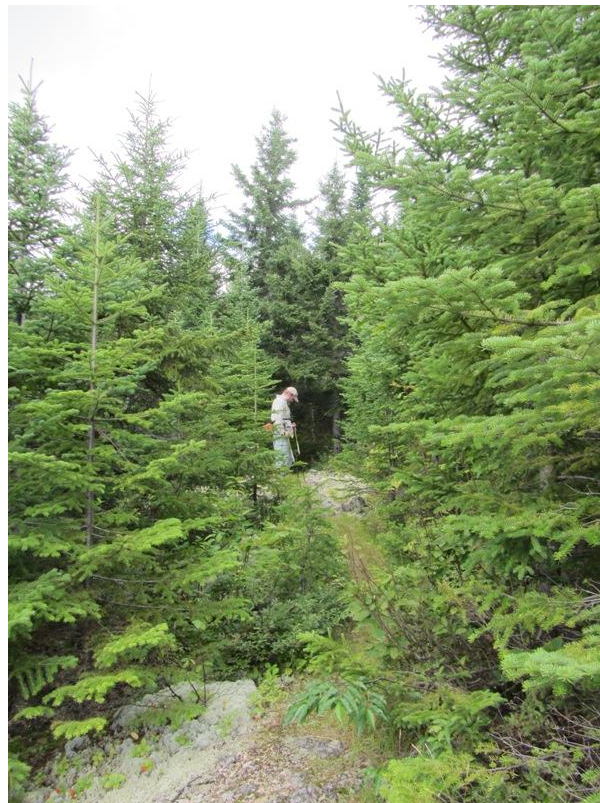




The Christmas Tree Dilemma; Forward by Jeff Feaga

Hello everyone. Early January is the time when most people take down their Christmas trees, so this is an appropriate time to think about the environmental impact of real versus artificial trees. I know that I always contemplate this question whenever I'm trying to get my once-living tree out the door without spreading needles all over the house.



Balsam fir trees make excellent Christmas trees and grow abundantly in the Northeastern United States. In Frederick County, display quality Christmas trees are either imported from other areas or are planted and grown with considerable maintenance. Photo taken in Maine by Jeff Feaga.

The following article about making the right environmental choice when choosing a Christmas tree was written by Sylvia Carignan of the Frederick News Post. We appreciate Sylvia's attention to various environmental topics relevant to citizens of Frederick and beyond. A link to the original article is available [here](#).

Real Versus Artificial Christmas trees: Which is Greener?

By Sylvia Carignan of the Frederick News Post scarignan@newspost.com Dec 25, 2015

In the debate between real Christmas trees and artificial Christmas trees, a question is still unanswered: Which has the bigger impact on the environment?

The American Christmas Tree Association, which promotes artificial and real trees, paid for a survey in 2011 and found both options have a similar amount of impact on the environment.

"The conclusion was that both a real and an artificial Christmas tree have a negligible impact on the environment, especially when compared to something we all do each and every day, like drive a car," said Jami Warner, executive director of the American Christmas Tree Association.

Trade associations that support real trees or fake trees tend to support their own options.

The National Christmas Tree Association, which promotes the purchase of real trees, emphasizes that real trees are recyclable and can become soil erosion barriers, mulch or bird feeders.

Shannon Moore, manager of the Frederick County Office of Sustainability and Environmental Resources, said an artificial tree would have to be used for about 20 years for it to be more environmentally friendly than chopping down a real tree every year.

Chemicals are used in the production of artificial trees, she said, and they are usually shipped to the buyer from thousands of miles away.

"Since there are really great, well-managed tree farms in the area that have good environmental practices, I would go for the real tree," Moore said. "That way you also support a local business and help keep agricultural land productive."

Michael Ryan's family has run Clemsonville Tree Farm for 50 years. They are currently in Union Bridge.

The increased popularity of artificial trees in the mid-1980s took customers away from his business. In the early 1980s, they would sell more than 4,000 trees a year. Now, they sell from 500 to 1,000 trees in a year.

He said few people choose to buy a tree with the roots to plant it in their yard after the holidays.

"Not too many people dig a tree. First of all, it's a hard job," he said. "Second of all, we used to sell trees [with roots] here; we don't do it any longer. They're very heavy."

Instead, Ryan suggested, people looking to help the environment should enjoy their tree during the holiday season, then buy a new one in March or April to plant in their yard.

Leaving a tree in a heated room for more than a week can decrease its chances of surviving in the cold outside, he said. According to the American Christmas Tree Association, 99 million U.S. households will display a Christmas tree in their home during the 2015 holiday season.

Follow Sylvia Carignan on Twitter: [@SylviaCarignan](https://twitter.com/SylviaCarignan).

